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ABSTRACT

A study evaluated the effects of a four-part decision-making workshop on students who were undecided about their selection of a major field of study. More than 1,500 freshmen at a midwestern university who had not declared majors received letters inviting them to the four 2-hour sessions of the workshop. Forty-two students volunteered to enroll in the group counseling program. The four sessions focused on the following: (1) discovering personal strengths and work preferences; (2) clarifying work values and identifying work preferences; (3) identifying interests and work preferences; and (4) investigating career resources, majors, and putting it all together. The group facilitators were trained professionals in the field of career planning and placement and advising. A two-group pre- and posttest experimental design was used, with the control group mostly freshmen students who received no career guidance and education. Students completed pre- and posttest questionnaires, both of which included a scale to measure the treatment effect of the four-part career decision-making process. An independent measures t-test indicated that students who were exposed to the experimental treatment scored significantly higher on decisional closure. The study concluded that short-term programs have value as a group career counseling model. (Author/KC)

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What Is the Impact of the Four Part Decision Making Process on "Undecided" Students?

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Running Head: FOUR PART PROCESS

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Abstract

This study evaluates the effects that a four part decision making workshop has on students who are undecided about the selection of a major field of study. Over 1500 freshmen students having an undeclared major status received letters inviting them to this workshop with 42 students volunteering to enroll in the group counseling program. A two-group pre- and posttest experimental design was used. Experimental group facilitators were trained professionals in the field of Career Planning and Placement and Pre-Major Advising. The control group were mostly freshmen students who received no career guidance and education.

Students completed pre- and posttest questionnaires, both of which included a scale to measure the treatment effect of the four part career decision making process. An independent measures t test indicated that students who were exposed to the experimental treatment scored significantly higher on decisional closure. The findings of this study encourage the value of a short-term program as a group career counseling model.

What Is the Impact of a Four Part Decision Making Workshop on "Undecided" Students?

Currently, the higher educational setting is replete with students who have career problems to which career helpers must respond. Career-planning groups have emerged as a major means of providing career assistance to greater numbers of individuals. Groups seems to offer the advantage of being more efficient than one-to-one counseling. In fact, Holland, Magoon and Spokan (1981) believe that most career counseling is delivered in these group formats. Many formats have been used, from one-session workshops to 45- hour college courses (McAuliffe & Fredrickson, 1990).

Individuals who are uncommitted to an occupational direction can be classified as either career undecided or career indecisive. Career undecided individuals are those who have merely delayed a career decision in order to gather information about themselves, occupations or the process of career decision

making. Career indecisive individuals are those have underlying psychological dysfunction (Kaplan & Brown, 1987) such as anxiety, locus of control and self-concept issues.

Pickering and Vac (1984) reviewed 47 research articles between 1975 and 1981 that addressed the effectiveness of career development for college students and concluded: 1. More than half of the studies were short-term interventions, 79% reported positive gains and 2. About 1/4 of the interventions were self-help programs with 67% demonstrating improvement (Herr, 1991). Other group counseling experiences can be cited that have been effective in reducing undecidedness and increasing maturity.

Questions have been raised as to the impact of short-term workshops (one to four two-hour sessions) on career decision making and the time and staffing requirements of long-term treatments. We have conducted this study to assess the value of this four part decision making workshop on a student's ability to narrow down his field of choices, to reduce his options and select a career direction. This workshop which was taught at Bowling Green State University consisted of four two-hour sessions and was based on a four part decision making model: 1. discovering personal strengths and work

preferences, 2. clarifying work values and identifying work preferences, 3. identifying interests and work preferences, 4. investigating career resources, majors and putting it all together. Both the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Briggs-Myers, 1977) and the Strong Interest Inventory(Strong, 1985) were exercises used to assess personality type and vocational interest. Information on SIGI+, a computerized program to help plan a career, was given as well as information regarding internship programs, cooperative education and summer job fairs. The students were introduced to the Center for Career Resources to assist in exploring occupations, potential employers, job search techniques, and research regarding undergraduate and professional schools. The students were taught to use the Dictionary of Occupational Titles and the Occupational Outlook Handbook.

Based on the above program, it is reasonable to expect that students ability to decide on a major should be enhanced through participation of this career group counseling model. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to provide evidence of the effects of participation in this career decision making workshop on decidedness.

Method

Subjects

Over 1500 letters stating that a career decision making workshop is being offered to provide assistance in identifying a major and career direction were sent from Career Planning and Placement, Bowling Green State University to full-time students having 0-90 credit hours with undecided major status. Forty-two students served as volunteer participants.

Approximately 83% of the students were freshmen, with 87% female and 13% male. Eighty-one percent of the students were average or above average in academic performance with 7% excellent students. Seventy-five percent of the students felt they needed to start doing something about their major selection now.

Instrumentation

A self-report questionnaire consisting of 35 questions was a practical method of obtaining information. Of these 35 questions, 8 of them were designed to collect demographic information such as gender, age, grade, academic performance and class. Decidedness was measured by the sum of five

questions dealing with self-exploration such as personality, interests, work values and abilities and the question, "To what extent do you know what occupation you want in the future"? This part of the instrument was a modification of the Career Decision Making Questionnaire by Jackson and Egner, (1974). An internal reliability estimate was computed for decidedness based on these five questions; the resulting Cronbach's alpha indicator of internal consistency was .88.

Ten questions focused on the group's values or preferences for job characteristics such as high income, job security, leisure and advancement. At the end of the group counseling instruction, the experimental group showed no treatment effect with no change in values.

The last 12 questions were a modification of Crites' Career Maturity Inventory (1973). This scale intended to measure career maturity before and after counseling intervention which proved to have a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .56.

A panel of knowledgeable colleges at Career Planning and Placement, Bowling Green State University agreed that this questionnaire reflects the content of the treatment.

Procedures

Experimental group facilitators skilled in career counseling administered the pre and posttest questionnaire. The control group questionnaire was administered by one of the group counseling facilitators. Students completed the pretest questionnaire before the first session of the group counseling; the posttest was administered at the end of the final session. During the course of the two weeks of the group counseling, the control group completed the pretest at the beginning of the first week and then completed the posttest at the end of the second week.

Results

Regarding the pre and posttest group, an independent measures t test indicated that the sum of the questions regarding personality, interests, abilities and work values as well as the question, "To what extent do you now know what occupation you want in the future"? showed a value of $t = 6.9$, $df = 76$, $p < .001$. Means and standard deviations for both groups, pre and posttest are given in the table. Regarding this one question alone, "To what extent do you know what

occupation you want in the future"?, the pretest scores (M = 2.2, SD = .88) were lower than the posttest scores (M =3.0, SD = .85) with a t value indicating a treatment effect of $t = 3.9$, $df = 76$, $p < .001$.

Control group, pre and posttest, results have not been obtained as of yet. Further calculations are needed before this data can be examined.

Answering the major questions, the results conclude that there definitely was an impact made on the students' ability to narrow down their field of choice, to reduce options and select a career direction. See Table 1.

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Insert Table 1 here.

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With regard to values or preferences for job characteristics, pre as well as posttest groups showed t values with no level of significance. See Table 2.

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Insert Table 2 here.

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Value preferences in order from most preferred to least preferred were as follows: 91% of the students preferred working in the field of their interest as their highest value, 84% valued job security and high income, 65% preferred a job which involved helping others, with 64% valued advancement. The low side of the order were values such as leisure (56%), independence (46%), leadership (39%) and statue and prestige (39%).

Discussion

In this study, students exposed to the experimental treatment had significantly higher scores on the career decision making questionnaire pertaining to the content of the treatment program. Consistent wih Pickering and Vac (1984) reviews of career development for college students, this short-term program provides support and has proved positive gains which have been effective in reducing undecidedness.

Although the results do not directly explain why there was a a significant effect on the experimental group students, conclusions support the findings that due to the quality of the four part decision making program, students grew in their

ability to make a career decision. Other variables important to consider in explaining the reasons for the positive effect is the motivation of the participants toward information seeking and the time factor and anxiety that forces the student into decision making. Another possibility for decision making can also be attributed to other things happening in a student's life apart from this treatment workshop. This historical information would be essential in reporting explanations for the impact.

Generally, this study confirms the value of career planning groups as evidenced by this experimental group. This evidence parallels previous research by McAuliffe and Fredrickson (1990) who suggest that short-term treatment can produce positive outcomes.

It would not be expected of control group students who had no career counseling and instruction to show any significant difference between pretest and posttest findings. However, any reason for differences could be attributed to students beginning to think more about the questions between pretest and posttest administration which would be reflected in posttest scores.

Career undecidedness is a complex phenomenon but this research encourages the value of short-term career counseling groups which deal with self-exploratory issues, assisting the student in finding a fit between personal characteristics and occupation.

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TABLE 1

Standard Deviations and Means, Self-Knowledge as It Affects Decidedness.

Questions	Pretest		Posttest		t value	Prob
	M	SD	M	SD		
1. To what extent do you know what job you want in the future?	2.2	.88	3.0	.80	3.9	.001
2. Do you feel you understand what jobs are suitable to your interests?	2.2	.90	3.3	.67	6.4	.001
3 Do you feel you understand what jobs are suitable to personality?	2.5	.99	3.4	.69	4.7	.001
4. Do you feel you understand what jobs are suitable to your abilities?	2.2	.79	3.1	.69	5.0	.001
5. Do you feel you understand what jobs are suitable to you work values?	2.2	.79	3.1	.69	6.4	.001
Sum of Scores on 5 Questions	11.5	3.5	16.4	2.5	6.9	.001

*1 - not at all, 2 - not very well, 3 - fairly well, 4 - rather well 5 - very well

TABLE 2

Standard Deviations and Means of Values

	Pretest		Posttest		t value	Prob
Values	M	SD	M	SD		
high income	1.1	.37	1.0	.16	1.9	.05
security	1.1	.30	1.0	.28	.20	.83
leisure	1.4	.50	1.2	.46	1.4	.15
advancement	1.3	.48	1.2	.42	1.2	.20
status	1.6	.49	1.4	.50	1.6	.09
independence	1.4	.50	1.6	.89	1.4	.16
helping others	1.2	.40	1.4	.72	1.8	.07
variety	1.4	.50	1.4	.50	.22	.82
leadership	1.5	.55	1.5	.50	.01	.99
work in field of interest	1.0	.22	1.1	.31	.88	.38